gadamer K underview:

To understand requires internal critique of assumptions, but for us to even understand the critique requires that it start within the framework of our original for-meanings. Thus critique and development of the aff is important, but it must start within the affs general methodology, otherwise no engagement or development is possible. **GADAMER:**[[1]](#footnote-1)What Heidegger is working out here is not primarily a prescription for the practice of understanding, but a description of the way interpretive understanding is achieved. The point of Heidegger's hermeneutical reflection is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance. The description as such will be obvious to every interpreter who knows what he is about.3 All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze "on the things themselves" (which, in the case of the literary critic, are meaningful texts, which themselves are again concerned with objects). For the interpreter to let himself be guided by the things themselves is obviously not a matter of a single, "conscientious" decision, but is "the first, last, and constant task." For it is necessary to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpreter himself. A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. [They] project a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because [they are] reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. This description is, of course, a rough abbreviation of the whole. The process that Heidegger describes is that every revision of the fore projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation. A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore meanings that are not borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed "by the things" themselves, is the constant task of understanding. The only "objectivity**" here** is the confirmation of a fore-meaning **in its being** worked out. Indeed, what characterizes the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore meanings if not that they come to nothing in being worked out? But understanding realizes **its** full potential only when the fore-meanings that it begins with are not arbitrary. Thus it is quite right for the interpreter not to approach the text directly, relying solely on the fore-meaning already available to him, but rather explicitly to examine the legitimacy—i.e., the origin and validity—of the fore-meanings dwelling within him. This basic requirement must be seen as the radicalization of a procedure that we in fact exercise whenever we understand anything. Every text presents the task of not simply leaving our own linguistic usage unexamined—or in the case of a foreign language the usage that we are familiar with from writers or from daily intercourse. Rather, we regard our task as deriving our understanding of the text from the linguistic usage of the time or of the author. The question is, of course, how this general requirement can be fulfilled. Especially in the field of semantics we are confronted with the problem that our own use of language is unconscious. How do we discover that there is a difference between our own customary usage and that of the text? I think we must say that generally we do so in the experience of being pulled up short by the text. Either it does not yield any meaning at all or its meaning is not compatible with what we had expected. This is what brings us up short and alerts us to a possible difference in usage. Someone who speaks the same language as I do uses the words in the sense familiar to me—this is a general presupposition that can be questioned only in particular cases. The same thing is true in the case of a foreign language: we all think we have a standard knowledge of it and assume this standard usage when we are reading a text. What is true of fore-meanings that stem from usage, however, is equally true of the fore-meanings concerning content with which we read texts, and which make up our fore-understanding. Here too we may ask how we can break the spell of our own fore-meanings. There can, of course, be a general expectation that what the text says will fit perfectly with my own meanings and expectations. But what another person tells me, whether in conversation, letter, book, or whatever, is generally supposed to be his own and not my opinion; and this is what I am to take note of without necessarily having to share it. Yet this presupposition is not something that makes understanding easier, but harder, since the fore-meanings that determine my own understanding can go entirely unnoticed. If they give rise to misunderstandings, how can our misunderstandings of a text be perceived at all if there is nothing to contradict them? How can a text be protected against misunderstanding from the start? If we examine the situation more closely, however, we find that meanings cannot be understood in an arbitrary way. Just as we cannot continually misunderstand the use of a word without its affecting the meaning of the whole, so we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another. **Of course** this does not mean that when we listen to someone or read a book we must forget all our fore-meanings concerning the content and all our own ideas. All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. Now, the fact is that meanings represent a fluid multiplicity of possibilities (in comparison to the agreement presented by a language and a vocabulary), but within this multiplicity of what can be thought—i.e., of what a reader can find meaningful and hence expect to find—not everything is possible; and if a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying, he will not be able to fit what he has misunderstood into the range of his own various expectations of meaning. Thus there is a criterion here also. The hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things and is always in part so defined. This places hermeneutical work on a firm basis. A person trying To understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, **a person trying to understand** a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness **must be,** from the start, **sensitive to** the text's **alterity**. **But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices.** The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings.

Our assumption and conceptual tradition is inescapable. We need to understand knowledge as beginning from where we are at and progressing outwards. You cannot preclude arguments because they do not appeal to the right methodology, because the very value of that methodology would have to first be established non-methodologically. This is especially true as regards moral questions, as the question of how to consider morality first presupposes a moral claim that meets our current prejudices. We cannot simply reject the past or starting place but must start and work within that starting place developmentally. Gadamer 2[[2]](#footnote-2). Here is the point of departure for the hermeneutical problem. This is why we examined the Enlightenment's discreditation of the concept of "prejudice." What appears to be a limiting prejudice from the viewpoint of the absolute self-construction **of reason** in fact belongs to historical reality itself. If we want to do justice to [hu]man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. Thus we can formulate the fundamental epistemological question for a truly historical hermeneutics as follows: what is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome? We can approach this question by taking the Enlightenment's critical theory of prejudices, as set out above, and giving it a positive value. The division of prejudices into those of "authority" and those of "overhastiness" is obviously based on the fundamental presupposition of the Enlighenment, namely that methodologically disciplined use of reason can safeguard us from all error. This was Descartes' idea of method. Overhastiness is the source of errors that arise in the use of one's own reason. Authority, however, is responsible for one's not using one's own reason at all. Thus the division is based on a mutually exclusive antithesis between authority and reason. The false prepossession in favor of what is old, in favor of authorities, is what has to be fought. Thus the Enlightenment attributes to Luther's reforms the fact that "the prejudice of human prestige, especially that of the philosophical [he means Aristotle] and the Roman pope, was greatly weakened."19 The Reformation, then, gives rise to a flourishing hermeneutics which teaches the right use of reason in understanding traditionary texts. Neither the doctrinal authority of the pope nor the appeal to tradition can obviate the work of hermeneutics, which can safeguard the reasonable meaning of a text against all imposition This kind of hermeneutics need not lead to the radical critique of religion that we found, for example, in Spinoza. Rather, the possibility of supernatural truth can remain entirely open. Thus especially in the field of German popular philosophy, the Enlightenment limited the claims of reason and acknowledged the authority of Bible and church. We read in Walch, for example, that he distinguishes between the two classes of prejudice—authority and overhastiness—but considers them two extremes, between which it is necessary to find the right middle path, namely a mediation between reason and biblical authority. Accordingly, he regards prejudices deriving from overhastiness as prejudices in favor of the new, a predisposition to the overhasty rejection of truths simply because they are old and attested by authorities.20 Thus he disputes the British free thinkers (such as Collins and others) and defends the historical faith against the norm of reason. Here the meaning of prejudice deriving from overhastiness is given a conservative reinterpretation. There can be no doubt, however, that the real consequence of the Enlightenment is different: namely the subjection of all authority to reason. Accordingly, prejudice from overhastiness is to be understood as Descartes understood it—i.e., as the source of all error in the use of reason. This fits in with the fact that after the victory of the Enlightenment, when hermeneutics was freed from all dogmatic ties, the old division returns in a new guise. Thus Schleiermacher distinguishes between partiality and overhastiness as the causes of misunderstanding.21 To the lasting prejudices due to partiality he contrasts the momentary ones due to overhastiness, but only the former are of interest to those concerned with scientific method. It no longer even occurs to Schleiermacher that among the prejudices in favor of authorities there might be some that are true—yet this was implied in the concept of authority in the first place. His alteration of the traditional division of prejudices documents the victory of the Enlightenment. Partiality now means only an individual limitation of understanding: "The one-sided preference for what is close to one's own sphere of ideas." In fact, however, the decisive question is concealed behind the concept of partiality. That the prejudices determining what I think are due to my own partiality is a judgment based on the standpoint of their having been dissolved and enlightened, and it holds only for unjustified prejudices. If, on the other hand, there are justified prejudices productive of knowledge, then we are back to the problem of authority. Hence the radical consequences of the Enlightenment, which are still to be found in Schleiermacher's faith in method, are not tenable. The Enlightenment's distinction between faith in authority and using one's own reason is, in itself, legitimate. If the prestige of authority displaces one's own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its being a source of truth, and that is what the Enlightenment failed to see when it denigrated all authority. To be convinced of this, we need only consider one of the greatest forerunners of the European Enlightenment, namely Descartes. Despite the radicalness of his methodological thinking, we know that Descartes excluded morality from the total reconstruction of all truths by reason. This was what he meant by his provisional morality. It seems to me symptomatic that he did not in fact elaborate his definitive morality and that its principles, as far as we can judge from his letters to Elizabeth, contain hardly anything new. It is obviously unthinkable to defer morality until modern science has progressed enough to provide a new basis for it. In fact the denigration of authority is not the only prejudice established by the Enlightenment. It also distorted the very concept of authority. Based on the Enlightenment conception of reason and freedom, the concept of authority could be viewed as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, blind obedience. This is the meaning that we find in the language critical of modern dictatorships. But this is not the essence of authority. Admittedly, it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one's own. This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge. It is true that authority implies the capacity to command and be obeyed. But this proceeds only from the authority that a person has. Even the anonymous and impersonal authority of a superior which derives from his office is not ultimately based on this hierarchy, but is what makes it possible. Here also its true basis is an act of freedom and reason that grants the authority of a superior fundamentally because he has a wider view of things or is better informed—i.e., once again, because he knows more.22 Thus, acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person who presents them. But in this way they become prejudices not just in favor of a person but a content, since they effect the same disposition to believe something that can be brought about in other ways—e.g., by good reasons. Thus the essence of authority belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices free from the extremism of the Enlightenment.Here we can find support in the romantic criticism of the Enlightenment; for there is one form of authority particularly defended by romanticism, namely tradition. That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and **our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us**—and not just what is clearly grounded—**always has power over our attitudes and behavior. All education depends on this**, and even though, in the case of education, the educator loses his function when his charge comes of age and sets his own insight and decisions in the place of the authority of the educator, **becoming mature does not mean that a person becomes his own master** in the sense that he is freed from all tradition. The real force of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means createdby a free insight or grounded on reasons. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity. And in fact it is to romanticism that we owe this correction of the Enlightenment: that **tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and** in large measure **determines our** institutions and **attitudes**. What makes classical ethics superior to modern moral philosophy is that it grounds the transition from ethics to "politics," the art of right legislation, on the indispensability of tradition.23 By comparison, the modern Enlightenment is abstract and revolutionary. The concept of tradition, however, has become no less ambiguous than that of authority, and for the same reason—namely that what determines the romantic understanding of tradition is its abstract opposition to the principle of enlightenment. Romanticism conceives of tradition as an antithesis to the freedom of reason and regards it as something historically given, like nature. And whether one wants to be revolutionary and oppose it or preserve it, tradition is still viewed as the abstract opposite of free self determination, since its validity does not require any reasons but conditions us without our questioning it. Of course, the romantic critique of the Enlightenment is not an instance of tradition's automatic dominance of tradition, of its persisting unaffected by doubt and criticism. Rather, a particular critical attitude again addresses itself to the truth of tradition and seeks to renew it. We can call it "traditionalism." It seems to me, however, that there is no such unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason. However problematical the conscious restoration of old or the creation of new traditions may be, the romantic faith in the "growth of tradition," before which all reason must remain silent, is fundamentally like the Enlightenment, and just as prejudiced. The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violentl**y**, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, **and it combines with the new to create a new value.** At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal. That is why both the Enlightenment's critique of tradition and the romantic rehabilitation of it lag behind their true historical being. These thoughts raise the question of whether in the hermeneutics of the human sciences the element of tradition should not be given its full value. Research in the human sciences cannot regard itself as in an absolute antithesis to the way in which we, as historical beings, relate to the past. At any rate, our usual relationship to the past is not characterized by distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather, we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process—i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or exemplar, a kind of cognizance that our later historical judgment would hardly regard as a kind of knowledge but as the most ingenuous affinity with tradition. Hence in regard to the dominant epistemological methodologism we must ask: has the rise of historical consciousness really divorced our scholarship from this natural relation to the past? Does understanding in the human sciences understand itself correctly when it relegates the whole of its own historicality to the position of prejudices from which we must free ourselves? Or does "unprejudiced scholarship" share more than it realizes with that naive openness and reflection in which traditions live and the past is present?

Thus, engagement with the aff presupposes starting engagement from within the aff project. Simply precluding the aff framework or role of the ballot via an alternative one is hermeneutically flawed by subverting the coherentist structure of knowledge development.

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer. Truth and Method. 1960. [modified for gendered language] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hans-Georg Gadamer. Truth and Method. 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)